

Dear Honorable Connecticut legislators,

I am contacting you to explain my serious concerns around and objections to Proposed Bill 5429. While the goals that drive support for the bill are reasonable, I believe this bill is a damaging and counterproductive way to try to achieve those goals. If enacted, the Bill could have very bad consequences for my family personally and would force us to consider relocating to another state, even though our children have happily lived here their whole lives. I sincerely urge you to oppose this bill.

I live in the Westport neighborhood right over the bridge from the train station at Saugatuck. We have lived in Westport for about twenty years (relocated from another state) and four years ago decided to buy a home closer to the train station that would provide us easy access to the train station and reduce my commute to New York City. We live in a warm and welcoming community which is culturally diverse and comprises many families that span generations and include many elementary and high school children. Additionally, we welcome the many residents living in adjacent streets walking through our neighborhood streets to the train station and nearby Saugatuck shops and restaurants. Traffic on our street and connecting streets is very light, so my children can ride bikes and play with their friends in the neighborhood without my wife nor myself worrying at all.

I strongly believe this Proposed Bill could undermine everything I have worked so hard to achieve in terms of my family's living conditions, with minimal benefit to anyone except real estate developers who might tear down a lovely home in our quiet residential neighborhood to erect a multi-family condo complex for a quick profit. If this legislation passes, the mere possibility of a single-family home being converted into a 15-unit complex will immediately drive down property values across all neighborhoods in Westport located within a half mile of the train station (and also likely affect homes on connected streets even beyond the half mile radius). This will unfairly bring direct harm to families who made it a priority to minimize the commute time of the working parent(s), which in fact includes many working mothers in our neighborhood who value the ease of access to our train station.

In the southern portion of the state generally families who need to commute into New York City for work have selected to live near the railroad station. How does it make sense for Connecticut to punish these hard-working families who contribute so much to the tax base? Encouraging haphazard multi-family development around train stations will be a net economic loss for our state coffers and undermine the programs we all want to see appropriately funded. Any tiny revenue benefit from a few condo developments will be more than offset by the negative impact on property values in surrounding areas and the broader discouragement of new families seeking to move to our state. It is unfairly punitive to families who already happen to be located in affected zones and will rob many children of the safe and secure low traffic streets on which they play.

Post-Covid, with many New York City office workers now having the option to work from home a couple days a week, towns like Westport have been an economic engine for Connecticut and drive our tax base. We should be passing laws that encourage this positive economic dynamic. Instead, Proposed Bill 5429 is almost spectacularly well-designed to ruin it. Who wants to buy a house in a quiet neighborhood when you never know if the lot next door will be sold to a developer looking to make a quick buck? In such a scenario, a family could be financially destroyed as their home equity is instantly wiped away. Please understand that

families take factors like this into consideration when making the most important financial decision of their lives, where to buy a home. Again, the mere *possibility* of such haphazard development will cause instantaneous economic harm to Connecticut families the moment this legislation is passed, which is what makes this legislation so damaging and foolish.

Another related issue to consider is that densifying areas around train stations will only exacerbate existing traffic problems, discourage use of mass transit and deter families with parents who work in New York City and other commutable locations from looking for homes in Connecticut. Traffic around the Westport train station is a huge issue at the moment and threatens the practical viability of the station itself; we need easier access to train stations, not more congestion. By densifying areas around train stations, Proposed Bill 5429 will only worsen traffic problems that are already at critical levels. In many ways, areas around train stations are the last place we should be focusing on in terms of residential densification. From a climate change perspective, we want to promote use of trains, not prevent it by fueling congestion. We want our public transit infrastructure to be accessible, not clogged.

Thank you for carefully considering my perspective as someone whose family will be directly and seriously harmed by this potential legislation. I understand that this is a proposal only. The goals of the legislation are laudable, but the impact will do much more harm than good. I implore you to think about the reality of infrastructure in neighborhoods like mine across the state before you adopt a big change that will affect all of us.

Thank you,

Ralph Martino
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